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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001901

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TAGS: PGOV PREL TU

SUBJECT: TURKEY: AKP VICTORY A "MEMORANDUM" TO THE GENERALS

REF: ANAKA 1899

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Kelly Degnan, for Reasons 1.4  
(b,d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY AND COMMENT. As the magnitude of the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) win in the July 22 election sinks in, many credit AKP's track record, successful economic policies, and issue-based election campaign with boosting AKP to over 46 percent. AKP -- far better than its party rivals or state institutions -- was keyed in to public concerns. At the same time, most also credit (or blame) the military's heavy-handed efforts to influence public sentiment with generating an electoral backlash that rewarded the perceived victims. The widely-held negative assessment of the military's role may deter it from further interference, at least overtly. Overall, and perhaps optimistically, many see the election as proof that Turkey's electorate expects a consolidated, mature democracy and rejects the paternalistic hand that has guided them in the past. Even AKP's opponents appear hopeful that the new government, strong but not too strong, will move Turkey beyond polarizing debates toward a more affirmative and reform-minded agenda -- and that the feckless opposition's failure will jar it into doing a better job. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

AKP's Victory Interpreted as a Message to the Generals...

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¶2. (C) Pundits are calling the July 22 election a "coup by ballot box," alluding to the April 27 memorandum on the military's website that precipitated the collapse of the presidential election and forced early elections (the "e-coup"). Although the Republican People's Party (CHP) Chairman Deniz Baykal egged the military on this spring to the point that the generals publicly told him to back off, CHP is now blaming the brass: CHP Vice Chairman Mustafa Ozyurek stated the April 27 e-memorandum worked for AKP's advantage. In a written statement, Nationalist Action Party (MHP) Chairman Devlet Bahceli also laid responsibility at the generals' feet, claiming AKP won underserved success because the public reacted against undemocratic interference with parliament's will. One local official -- a rare MHP mayor -- observed that villagers in his district say that AKP was treated unfairly during the presidential election process.

¶3. (SBU) Many columnists give this assessment a more sophisticated twist: rather than simply producing sympathy

votes for the victim AKP, the public rejected both the pressures of the secular establishment and the politics of fear. Lale Saiibrahimoglu (pro-AKP Today's Zaman) identified one of the more important outcomes of Sunday's elections as "the rejection ... of a fear-based imposition of policies by the so-called secular elites who have totally ignored the real problems of the country". Erdal Safak (Sabah) urged the "merchants of fear and conspiracy theories" to go home. In an unusual convergence of views, Sami Kohen (Milliyet) and Ibrahim Karagul (Yeni Safak) separately argued that the western media's ideological assessment that the "Islamists" had vanquished the "secularists" or that civilians defeated the military was a facile treatment that misrepresents Turkey's complex social and economic dynamics.

¶4. (SBU) Even so, some argue that the era of military-bureaucratic guardianship of the republic has passed; the agitation of fears (of Islamic overthrow of the Republic, of terrorism, of separatism) in recent months has not only not been persuasive, it has exposed the elite power class's desperate struggle to remain relevant and in control. Haluk Sahin (Radikal) compared "Old Turkey" -- characterized by an elite charged with creating and protecting a modern society from a backward and poor public -- and "New Turkey, a project of opening up to the world, developing human rights, democracy, and transparency. Sahin argued that the 2002 elections marked the beginning of the struggle between the two; now the country has entered the New Turkey period. Ali Bayramoglu (Yeni Safak) assessed the elections as the voters asking the military to return to their barracks. Sukru Kucuksahin (Hurriyet) told us that the military would have to be quiet now. "Turks love the miltiary as soldiers, but don't love them as politicians," he said.

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#### ...But Economics, Other Factors Drove the Vote

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¶5. (SBU) A few columnists acknowledge AKP's own role in its electoral success; Ali Bulac (Today's Zaman) gave AKP about a third of the credit, with the rest going to the hapless opposition parties and bureaucratic system. Radio talk show callers voting AKP claimed a full range of motivations, but emphasized economic reasons. Indeed, AKP's strong showing may have decided the debate about whether ordinary Turks are feeling the benefits of Turkey's recent economic boom. Pundits are noting voters' economic motivations as a significant factor, and polls show economic factors as decisive. In a recent Pew poll, 70 percent of Turkish respondents cited economic problems as their top concern; a KONDA poll reported 78.3 percent of voters claimed their economic situation and expectations as a factor in their vote. Concerns about democracy motivated 13.9 percent, and secularist concerns motivated 10.3 percent.

¶6. (C) AKP's dramatic increase in the Southeast is widely attributed both to AKP's successful economic policies and its challenging "the system" from within (reftel). Derya Sazak (Milliyet) argued that AKP came to power by taking over the space vacated by the left, after reinventing itself as a centrist party by drawing in moderate names and hiving off too-conservative elements.

¶7. (C) At least some contacts were surprises by AKP's election results, which significantly exceeded even AKP's aspirations. One agricultural businessman said all his farmer contacts must have been lying to him, because they seem to have voted for AKP despite regularly complaining about the party. Former Democratic Left Party (DSP) minister, Tayyibe Gulek-Domec, was also shocked by the result and blamed CHP's failure to put forward a better message, including on economic policy. She attributed AKP's success to widespread charity and handouts. Gulek-Domec said she hoped the opposition's bitter failure would jolt them into doing a better job.

**AKP Must Seek Consensus, Revive Reform Efforts**

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**¶18.** (C) Many observers express quiet relief at a parliament composition that will compel AKP cooperation with more than the 22 "independents" affiliated with the Democratic Society Party (DTP) in selecting a presidential candidate. Prime Minister Erdogan's signals so far have been interpreted as reassuring gestures of compromise, even by his detractors, but in a July 25 press conference Abdullah Gul signaled that his candidacy remains on the table. Retired General Edip Baser, the former Special Envoy for Combatting the PKK, was quoted as telling La Repubblica that if the presidential election gets out of hand, the military would intervene again and not necessarily through an electronic memo.

**¶19.** (SBU) Erdal Safak (Sabah) expressed the hope that this expression of public will in defiance of a "venomous atmosphere" would help Turkey return to an agenda of reform, human rights, and democracy. Going forward, Husnu Mahalli (Aksam) argued that this election would result in a more relaxed, confident foreign policy; he predicted stronger relations with the EU, a stronger stand against the US, and improved standing among major states, particularly regarding Turkey's good relations with Syria and Iran. Ali Bulac (Today's Zaman) argued that the public's expectations regarding improved income distribution, allocation of resources for the poorer segments of society, and the rights of the Sunni religious majority (headscarf issue; imam-hatip schools) also helped drive the election result and should be reflected in the new government's agenda.

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